DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 088 034 CS 000 960

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TITLE One Approach to Teaching Critical Listening.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Spring Reading and Language Arts Conference (Bowling Green State University, April 20, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Critical Thinking; Elementary Grades; *Listening Comprehension; *Listening Skills; Mass Media; *Persuasive Discourse; Publicize; Reading Comprehension; Speech Skills; *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a format for teaching elementary school students the skills necessary to analyze and evaluate commercial propaganda. Three steps suggested for the teaching of critical listening are setting a standard of highly conscious criteria in the minds of the listener, sifting the evidence and making a critical judgment, and drawing a conclusion or acting on the judgment made. Some specific suggestions for each of the steps include: (1) taping radio advertisements and encouraging the students to determine to which basic needs the message appeals, (2) reducing advertisements to writing to facilitate the identification of the persuasion technique being used, (3) providing the students with criteria to judge advertising propaganda, and (4) discussing in small groups or individually whether or not a particular advertised product should be bought. (WR)

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# One Approach to Teaching Critical Listening

Daniel Tutolo

Since the early 1960's and indeed even before that time there has been a movement to open another frontier in learning--listening. Technological advances in electronic devices for communication including radio, television, and other electronic media have emphasized the need to improve listening. Rapid progress has been delayed because of the current inability to answer some basic questions about listening, but partial answers have been found for some of the fundamental questions.[14]

Waiting until research is definitive before teaching listening seems unfair to our present generation of elementary children who need facility in this skill. The search for instructional strategies continues for critical listening, a skill requiring analysis and synthesis of information, does not appear to be a skill learned through random learning.[9]

Lundsteen defined critical listening as a three step process including: 1. a standard of highly conscious criteria present in the mind of the listener; 2. sifting the evidence and making a critical judgment; 3. drawing a conclusion or acting on the judgment made. This paper which suggests a way to teach critical listening to elementary children, is concerned primarily with a method applicable to fifth and sixth grade level, yet some ideas would be practical with other age children.

Since many of the listening skills presently taught to children are the result of logical thinking rather than empirical fidelity, validation of the existence of these skills awaits scientific study. The present lack of validation, however, should not discourage attempts to teach

listening, for enough is known about auditory learning to suggest that significant strides can now be made. What is presently needed are some worthy strategies for teaching listening skills which are clear, specific and relatively easy to employ.

To help in this matter, Kellog listed a compendium of listening skills divided into two general categories: (1) listening to get information and (2) critical listening.[8] The critical listening skills are listed below:

1. Relating heard material to own experiences
2. Making use of contextual clues to determine unknown meanings
3. Discerning between fact and opinion
4. Recognizing that which is relevant
5. Making logical inferences from what is heard
6. Keeping an open mind before forming opinions
7. Skills relating to the analysis and judgment of propaganda.

This report provides a format for teaching the skills relating to the analysis and judgment of propaganda. The oral discourse is divided into constituent parts (analysis)[1] and a judgment is made of the message (evaluation).[2] These particular skills were selected because the other skills of critical listening are subsumed here, i.e. to analyze and judge propaganda the other skill competencies of critical listening seem to be essential.

Another reason for focusing attention on these skills is the availability of almost unlimited examples to elementary teachers. Selection of appropriate messages for analysis takes little effort. Radio advertisements bombard our ears daily. Normally we do not think of advertising as propaganda yet by definition it is a kind of propaganda.

Propaganda is any systematic, widespread dissemination or promotion of particular ideas, doctrines, practices et cetera which further one's own cause. Radio advertising can be defined as spoken matter that tells publicly about or praises a product, service, et cetera publicly so as to make people want to buy. Thus, by definition, advertising is a kind of propaganda.

Within the present century the popular image of propaganda has undergone change, and the word has come to acquire sinister overtones.[4] This change can be dated from World War I when the official use of propaganda was employed as a weapon in warfare to attempt to influence results. Advertising, too, has been accused of manipulating mass opinion and controlling men's minds. Although advertising may not be regarded as sinister, it too often seems filled with puffery to be taken as fact. In the minds of some people, Madison Avenue exemplifies the devil's symbol.[3]

On the other hand, several claims of the social benefits of advertising have been made and are worthy of note. It is claimed that advertising lowers prices by increasing the sale of an item. Secondly, it is claimed that advertising justifies itself economically by bringing knowledge of desirable goods to the customer. Finally, it is claimed that advertising brings about an improvement in the quality of goods because the advertiser's reputation is, in the long run, his livelihood.

Probably the truth of the matter lies somewhere between these opposing points of view. Advertising and propaganda are neither inherently good nor inherently bad. Our task as teachers is to help children to make intelligent judgments about a message. The three steps enumerated in the definition of critical listening provide an appropriate

vehicle for making judgments. (1) Setting a standard of highly conscious criteria in the minds of the listener, (2) Sifting the evidence and making a critical judgment, (3) Drawing a conclusion or acting on the judgment made.

STEP ONE

As an aid in this step Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shown in Figure 1 provides criteria in an easily comprehensible fashion. These criteria are delineated in Motivation and Personality, chapter five.[12]

A facsimile of these needs can be reproduced on a transparency for use with the overhead projector and they can be projected on a screen for study purposes. Maslow theorized that when one need is satisfied another need emerges. It is a false impression, however, that one need must be satisfied completely before another need emerges. In point of fact, most normal members of our society are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs. Radio advertisements could and most often do appeal to more than one need at a time.[13]

As another dimension of the first step, encourage a small group of pupils to tape four or five radio advertisements heard over local radio stations. Cassette recordings are particularly appropriate because they are practically child-proof. The advertisements should be re-played while the transparency of the hierarchy of needs appears on the screen. The pupils are encouraged to determine to which basic needs the message appeals. There need not be complete agreement during this discussion, and varied points of view might even be encouraged. In the interchange of ideas, it is likely that those children whose interpretations were narrow might benefit from the alternatives presented. In many advertisements

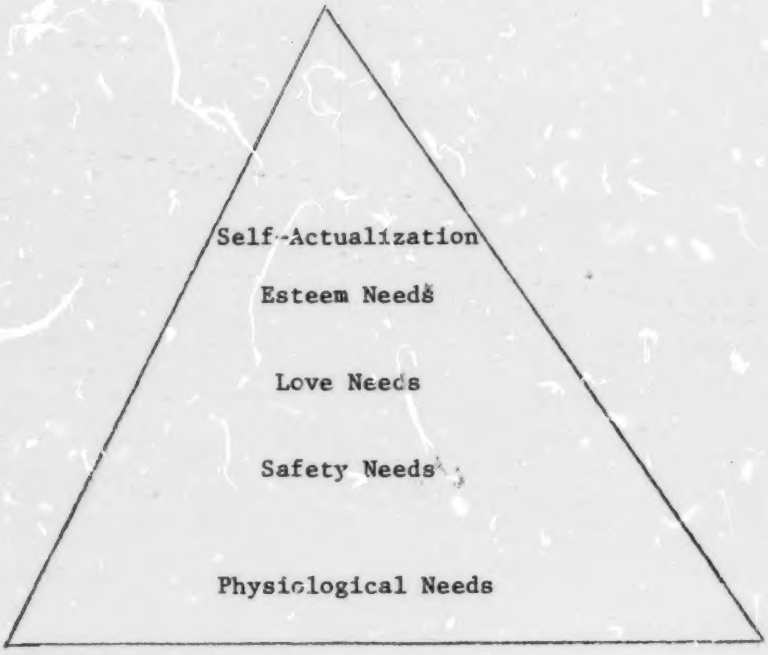
Self-Actualization
Esteem Needs
Love Needs
Safety Needs
Physiological Needs
To become whatever the individual is capable of
Competence, mastery, adequacy, achievement, recognition
Affection and belonging -- love means giving as well as receiving
Freedom from bodily illness, danger and continually disrupted routines
Including food, water, air, etc.

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

the appeal is subtle. Later it will be seen that appeals to emotional motives are more subtle than appeals to rational motives.

While conducting discussions of this kind with sixth grade children, the author found the classes very responsive. Because much dialogue ensued regarding the relative merits of the message in appealing to certain needs, it occasionally was necessary to remind the pupils that differences of opinion were expected. This concludes the first step in the process of critical listening: setting a standard of highly conscious criteria in the mind of the listener.

STEP TWO

In the second step of the critical listening lesson, it is necessary to sift the evidence and make a critical judgment. For this step the advertisement should be reduced to writing. When the mode of reception of the verbal data with which to think critically is purely auditory, there are more difficulties than when reception is obtained by reading. Reading imposes a helpful constraint of a relatively permanent medium.[10] Perhaps the possibility of reviewing the printed message with absence of time pressure, the possibility for clearer organization and the absence of personal influence are important here. A small group of eager children can play the advertisement several times and write it out without much difficulty. The teacher then can type the ad on a master and run off copies for the class.

The second step involves analyzing the advertisement to determine the techniques of persuasion being used. Harter and Sullivan delineate seventy-seven propaganda techniques.[7] We recommend reducing this number to a workable minimum of seven sometimes called the A.B.C.'s of propaganda

analysis.

1. Name Calling - Giving the idea a bad label to encourage rejecting or condemning the idea without examining the evidence. A variation of this technique is "glad words" where the intent is to associate a good feeling or idea with the products without examining the evidence.
2. Glittering Generalities - Sweeping and meaningless statements which appear to prove a point with an air of finality.
3. Transfer - Sometimes called Favorable Association. A catch-all technique which associates a plea with a socially acceptable principle, individual or object.
4. Testimonial sometimes called Endorsement - well-known people are used as endorsements of the merits of a product. If the big name thinks it is good, it must be good.
5. Card Stacking - A device which misuses statistics. Statistics often add an aura of unimpeachable sanctity to the argument. Few people are in a position to contradict the statistician.
6. Identification sometimes called Plain Folks - An effort is made to get the listener to identify with the message or product. This is a good product for you and me.
7. Band Wagon - A suggestion that "everyone" is doing it. -- Why don't you? The inference is made that you are out of step if you are not doing whatever is suggested.

If the advertisement is double spaced when typed, it is easier to record the persuasion technique being used. In step one, establishing in the minds of the listener a standard of highly conscious criteria, a

great deal of flexibility was permitted. Here less flexibility is advised. The children should be encouraged to make a judgment that a particular persuasion technique is being used. Small groups of children ought to be able to agree that a word or group of words represents a stated persuasion technique.

When the children have analyzed one advertisement, they are then ready to make a judgment about the advertisement. This is a synthesis process where a plan is produced. Lundsteen suggests three criteria to judge propaganda and advertising.[11]

1. It is bad if it adds up to a deliberate lie or if it encourages people to do things harmful to mental or physical health.
2. It is harmless if it advises some harmless product. (Most advertising falls into this category.)
3. It is good if it tries to get people to believe or do something of generally recognized worth or to aid people. (The public service announcement is regarded as persuasion toward a goal considered "good" by society.

STEP THREE

A decision is made to buy or not to buy the product. Note that while step one and two involve analysis and synthesis, step three calls for evaluation. This evaluation is difficult for children yet seems to get easier with practice. The advertiser is appealing to different buying motives. Directly, the appeal may involve rational buying motives or considerations of the full long range cost of the article. Less directly, the advertiser may be appealing to the emotional buying motives which are far more difficult to detect. Figure two is a checklist

Write the name of the product on the line. _____

Read the questions carefully and check the best answer.

| | An outstanding purchase | A good purchase | A questionable purchase | Not a good purchase | Not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Is the price what you would expect to pay for a comparable item? (price) | | | | | |
| How much will it cost to use? (cost in use) | | | | | |
| Will it hold up against repeated use? (durability) | | | | | |
| How often will it need servicing? (servicing) | | | | | |
| Is it dependable? (reliability) | | | | | |
| Will it last as long as it should? (length of useful usage) | | | | | |

Figure 2

Checklist Helpful When
Rational Buying Motives are Employed

to aid in making a decision to buy the product or to defer to another product. A small group of pupils can talk about the choices and decide on appropriate markings. The final decision to buy or not to buy can be an individual decision. Each person would be free to interpret the checklist in his own way.

Although it is hoped that consumers will use rational buying motives when making decisions about products to buy, such is not always the case. Too often emotional buying motives which serve one end - the gratification of ego - are determining factors. Emotional buying motives include security, ego comfort, recreation, emulation, pride, sex and many others. Any attempt to develop a complete classification of emotional buying motives is doomed to failure. Earlier it was suggested that appeals to emotional buying motives are very subtle. Many people are ashamed to admit the real reasons why they buy. An advertiser might appeal directly to rational motives and quite indirectly to emotional motives. It is perhaps beyond the scope of this paper to explore emotional buying behavior in detail. As long as children understand that emotional buying motives effect rational buying motives, the end is served. A long discussion of emotional buying motives with fifth and sixth grade children might serve to confuse rather than elucidate.

## Conclusions

This paper has presented an approach to teaching critical listening through the analysis of persuasion techniques used in radio advertising. Many are convinced today that improved programs for teaching listening are needed yet few definitive suggestions for teaching this complicated skill have been suggested. This paper is presented in the hope that others will find it useful.

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